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“Vessel (*skeuos*)” in 1 Thessalonians 4.4 and the Epistle of Jeremiah: The Strategy of a Pauline Metaphor in Light of the Apostle’s Jewish Background, Teaching, and Theology.

Nijay Gupta

ABSTRACT:

There are few exegetical enigmas in the New Testament more debated and discussed than the battle over the meaning of *skeuos* in 1 Thessalonians 4.4. In this article we will investigate a close lexical parallel in the Epistle of Jeremiah to determine how this Hellenistic Jewish text might illuminate Paul’s argument. Based on this comparison, we will propose that Paul is referring to the believer’s body using a traditional Jewish critique of idolatry that also commonly employs the term *skeuos*. Such an interpretation has the potential to open up this important text and tie it more closely to a recognized pattern of argumentation and paraenesis found in Paul’s letters more widely.

1. Introduction and History of Interpretation

Interpreters of Paul’s letters are aware that those complex and thorny passages of his that elude perspicuity spark some of the most lively discussions and encourage serious exegetical acuity as his work and thought are explored. One particular verse, 1 Thessalonians 4.4, has generated engagement after engagement in hopes of solving the mystery of the clause ‘εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι’. The RSV translates this ‘that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself’; the NRSV, ‘that each one of you know how to control your own body’.¹ What accounts for the very

¹ Those preferring the ‘wife’ interpretation include Theodore of Mopsuestia; Augustine; J.E. Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* (New York: Scribner’s, 1912); R.F. Collins, *Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians* (BETL 66; Leuven: University Press, 1984); N. Baumert, ‘Brautwerbung—das einheitliche Thema von 1 Thess 4,3-8’, in *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (ed. R. Collins; Leuven: University Press, 1990), 316-39; A. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 226. The ‘body’ view is advocated by Tertullian; Chrysostom; B. Rigaux, *Les épîtres aux Thessaloniens* (Paris: Gabalda, 1956); F.F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*

translations and meanings of this verse is the understanding of the two words σκευός and κτάομαι and, most importantly, how they relate to one another in a meaningful way. The former word, σκευός, literally means 'vessel', but is employed as a metaphor in this instance. Observing other occasions where Paul uses the word σκευός symbolically (2 Cor 4.7; Rom 9.21-23; 2 Tim 2.20-1²), one would naturally be led to associate it with a person as a whole, or as a functional equivalent to σῶμα. What hinders simply carrying on this assumption is the meaning of the verb κτάομαι. Scholars recognize that the present tense of the verb (which we have in 1 Thess 4.4) is best understood ingressively as 'to acquire' or 'to obtain'.³ In some instances, we find κτάομαι used in combination with γυνή to mean 'to acquire a wife' (see Ruth 4.5, 10; Sir 36.24).⁴ In such a case, Paul would be forming a 'hybrid expression'⁵ by substituting σκευός for γυνή. Other evidence is marshaled to defend the interpretation of σκευός as wife. In particular, in 1 Peter 3.7 husbands are commanded to be considerate to their wife as the 'weaker vessel (ἀσθενεστέρῳ σκεύει)'.⁶ However, as many have

(WBC 45; Waco: Word, 1982); M. McGehee, 'A Rejoinder to Two Recent Studies Dealing With 1 Thessalonians 4:4', *CBQ* 51 (1989): 82-89; E. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians* (SP; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995).

² There are a number of interesting verbal and thematic parallels between 2 Tim 2.21 and 1 Thess 4.4 that have been largely ignored by scholars most likely because of the former's alleged pseudonymity. However, in both passages we find a distinct confluence of the language of vessels, honor, and holiness, as well as lust/passions ('ἐπιθυμία' in both 1 Thess 4.5 and 2 Tim 2.22).

³ See LXX Deut 28.68; 2 Sam 24.24; Amos 8.6; Ezek 7.12; Acts 8.20; see BAGD 455; LSJ 1001; Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 226.

⁴ See R.F. Collins, *Studies*, 313.

⁵ J.E. Smith, '1 Thessalonians 4:4: Breaking the Impasse', *BBR* (2001), 69.

⁶ C. Maurer goes as far as stating that 1 Pet 3.7 is influenced directly by Paul's statement in 1 Thess 4.4; see *TDNT* 7.367; also H. Binder, 'Paulus and Die Thessalonicherbrief', in *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (ed. R.F. Collins; BETL 87; Leuven: University Press, 1990), 87-93.

noted, here the implication of the comparative form of ἀσθενής is that both husband *and* wife are vessels.⁷

Another line of argumentation that favors the view of vessel as wife is an appeal to 'Jewish traditions', particularly language found in rabbinic sources (see, e.g., *B.Meg.* 12b).⁸ However, drawing conclusions from later sources and that were written in Hebrew rather than Greek is a risky interpretative move, let alone the implications of such a low view of marriage in Paul's discourse 'as though [the wife's] *raison d'être* were to provide a means by which her husband might satisfy his sexual appetite'.⁹

It is partly on the basis of the above concerns for the interpretation of vessel-as-wife that many have opted to regard it as simply referring to the body. This translation often takes κτᾶσθαι in a durative way, but Smith persuasively argues that a sufficient number of examples exist with this force in 'nonperfect forms' (including Prov 1.14; P.Tebt. 1.15.241-43; Aesop *Fab.* 289; Philo *Mos* 1.160; Luke 18.12;¹⁰ Josephus *Ant* 5.1.16 §54).¹¹ Finally, taking vessel to refer generically to 'body' would support the notion that the passage is referring to any and all believers, rather than just men or unmarried men.¹²

Malherbe, a recent proponent of the vessel-as-wife view, ultimately is unconvinced of the 'body' interpretation because of the 'natural ingressive' meaning of κτᾶομαι. A second problem for him is the

⁷ See, e.g., Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 83; P.J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 217.

⁸ This kind of rabbinic evidence is put forth by O.L. Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles: Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul* (SBLDS 80; Atlanta: Scholars, 1984), 72-3.

⁹ Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 83.

¹⁰ Luke 18.12: 'I give tithes on all that κτᾶμαι'; note that the Vulgate translates this as '*possideo*'.

¹¹ Smith, 'Impasse', 84-5.

¹² See a similar critique in McGehee, 'Rejoinder', 82-89; Smith, 'Impasse', 80-81.

appearance of 'ἐαυτοῦ' which Malherbe finds nonsensical if σκευός is taken to mean body.¹³ But one could easily reach the opposite conclusion as one would expect the dative pronoun if the meaning is 'acquire a wife *for* himself'.¹⁴ In the end, this is a non-issue when it is observed that ἐαυτοῦ is used of *both* 'wife' and 'body' in Ephesians 5.28a: 'In the same way, husbands should love their wife (τὰς ἐαυτῶν γυναῖκας) as they do their own bodies (τὰ ἐαυτῶν σώματα)'. The problem is further blunted by the probability that by this time 'in Hellenistic Greek the pronoun has lost much of its emphatic force'.¹⁵

Though Smith intended to 'break the impasse' with his article on the issue, many scholars have opted for an agnostic approach that recognizes what Rigaux stated more than half a century ago: we do not possess enough information to 'resolve the crosses' on this matter.¹⁶ In a recent overview of this interpretive enigma, Todd Still highlights the assumptions, presuppositions, and preferences for particular kinds of evidence that often lead scholars to one conclusion or another.¹⁷ Based on the analyses and critiques of Still, Smith, and McGehee, several issues are essential for discerning the meaning of Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4.4: (1) relating σκευός and κτᾶσθαι with special attention to the closest verbal and thematic parallels in contemporary literature, (2) a reading that attempts to account for the former 'instructions (παραγγέλίας)' mentioned in 4.2,

¹³ Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 227.

¹⁴ This argument is made by Smith, 'Impasse', 79.

¹⁵ G.P. Carras, 'Jewish Ethics and Gentile Converts: Remarks on 1 Thes 4,3-8', in R.F. Collins (ed.), *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (BETL 87; Leuven: University Press), 309.

¹⁶ Rigaux, *Thessaloniciens*, 503, as cited in Collins, *Studies*, 299. This same sentiment is expressed by B. Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1998), 53.

¹⁷ T. Still, 'Interpretive Ambiguities and Scholarly Proclivities in Pauline Studies: A Treatment of Three Texts from 1 Thessalonians 4 as a Test Case', *Currents in Biblical Research* 5.2 (2007): 207-19; note especially 213-15.

(3) a distinct connection with the issues of both consecration/sanctification (ἁγιασμός) and sexual immorality (πορνεία), and (4) an accounting for the rhetorical flow of thought in 4.3-8.

2. The 'Body' Argument: A New Defense

If it has not been sufficiently clear that my preference is for the vessel-as-body interpretation, I wish here not only to defend it, but to extend the argument in light of what is probably the most enlightening verbal parallel. Some scholars have chosen to rely on how either σκευός *or* κτῶσθαι is understood, with the vessel-as-body contingency relying on the former's usage, and the vessel-as-wife contingency on the latter, in general. But what has not been accounted for is in what sense these words are understood *together*. I have been only able to uncover one relevant text in which these words are brought together in a single idea, Epistle of Jeremiah 58:

So it is better to be a king who shows his courage, or a vessel (σκευός) in a house useful to the possessor (ὁ κεκτημένος) who uses it, than to be these false gods; better even the door of a house that protects its contents, than these false gods; better also a wooden pillar in a palace, than these false gods.¹⁸

In the context of a letter that is bent on criticizing the worship and dedication to idols, a main point of this author is that a false god fails in its sole purpose of being profitable to the one who possesses it. In a sense, it is better even to make a simple drinking cup than an idol because at least it will provide some service! Similar arguments against idolatry are found in a number of Jewish texts as the Epistle of Jeremiah is supposedly based on the polemic of Jeremiah 10 (see also Deut 4.27-8; Isa 40.18-20; 44.9-20; 46.1-7; Ps 115.4-8; 135.15-18). It would have been a particularly meaningful choice to speak of

¹⁸ All translations of ancient texts (including NT) are my own unless otherwise noted.

a household 'vessel', because such critical texts related idols to 'vessels' as well (e.g., Wis 15.13). Having a strong influence from Pharisaic Judaism, Paul would have undoubtedly been familiar with standard Jewish arguments against idolatry, as the Epistle of Jeremiah more closely represents language meant to prevent Jews from being tempted to worship idols and this perhaps found a place in the teaching of the synagogue. Indeed, based on clues in 1 Thessalonians itself, we can be fairly certain that Paul indeed *did* present such arguments to Gentiles who 'turned from idols to serve the living and true God' (1.9a).¹⁹ But what could this combination of *σκεῦος* and *κτᾶσθαι* mean in such a context?

If it was not uncommon for Jews to compare idols to 'vessels' that are empty and offer no use to their 'possessor', perhaps Paul was re-applying this analogy to the Thessalonians themselves. Paul's message, then, would be, *your body is a vessel that, when controlled, can bring honor to God. However, if you dishonor your 'vessel', it will become as useless and as empty as an idol!* Certainly this transference of cultic/idol imagery accords with other Pauline exhortations. In 1 Corinthians 5, applying elements of the Passover rites to his readers in a unique way, Paul urges them to expel the immoral brother because they are new lumps of unleavened dough (v.7). An exegetical analysis of 1 Thessalonians 4.1-8 will be able to flesh out the dynamics of this interpretation and offer potential clues as to how to understand Paul's flow of thought in this important hortatory passage.

¹⁹ Mark Bonington ('Fleeing idolatry: Social Embodiment of Anti-Idolatry in the First Century', in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity* [ed. S.C. Barton; London: T & T Clark, 2007], 108) observes that, though the early church did not maintain Jewish standards (overall) of circumcision, dietary regulations, and festal observances, it was very much in agreement with Jewish tradition and practice on the matter of the abhorrence of idolatry; see also P.J. Achtemeier, 'Gods Made with Hands: The New Testament and the Problem of Idolatry', *Ex Auditu* 44 (1999): 43-62.

3. An Exegetical Analysis of 1 Thessalonians 4.1-8

Chapter four commences the *probatio* (4.1-5.22) and exhorts the readers to pursue an ongoing commitment to what they had already learned. Paul begins with a friendly and collegial tone by referring to them as ‘brothers’ and employing the verb ἐρωτάω.²⁰ However, he immediately makes reference to the prior instructions given to them about how they ought to ‘live and to please God’ (4.1). In some sense, then, the Thessalonians received traditional teaching about morality and right-living that characterized them as Christ followers and distinguished them from pagans.²¹ It should be recognized, though, that clear bifurcations between one kind of teaching (i.e. ‘kerygmatic’) and another (i.e. ‘ethical’) may be too artificial since it would appear that Paul often based both on the life and death of Christ and the history of Israel.²²

It has also been argued by a number of scholars that Paul’s language of tradition and former instruction has a particularly *Jewish* character that includes a number of literary features that were found in rabbinic schools such as παρελάβετε (reflecting *masar-qibbel*) and περιπατεῖν (reflecting *halakah*).²³ In fact, R. Collins labels all of 1 Thessalonians with a ‘Jewish quality which pervades the entire first letter to the Thessalonians’.²⁴ K.K. Yeo acknowledges this but puzzles over why Paul would employ Jewish materials and

²⁰ See Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 218-19.

²¹ J.D.G. Dunn classifies this reference to traditional teaching under the rubric of ‘ethical tradition’, the most common category of Paul’s usage of tradition-language (see *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* [London: SCM, 1977], 68).

²² See particularly 1 Thess 2.11-13; 1 Cor 10.1-8; also J. Plevnik, ‘Pauline Presuppositions’, in *Thessalonian Correspondence* (ed. R. Collins; Leuven: University Press, 1990), 50-61; Dunn, *Unity*, 60-76.

²³ See Collins, *Studies*, 43; Carras, ‘Jewish Ethics’, 306-7; Weima, ‘Holiness’, 102-3.

²⁴ Collins, *Studies*, 315.

puzzles over why Paul would employ Jewish materials and arguments to Gentile readers.²⁵ However, Carras has correctly explained that on the matters of certain religious and social issues such as sexual deviance and idolatry, Paul could draw from standard Jewish moral exhortation, which would also have been familiar to what may have been an even small minority of the Thessalonians that had previous ties to the synagogue.²⁶

Paul, in verse three, explicates the grounds for his ethical instructions: ‘This is the will of God, your sanctification (ἀγιασμός)’ (4.3a). Earlier, in 3.11-12, holiness (ἀγιωσύνη) was further defined in regards to unity and an abundance of love within the community, whereas here it was more precisely related to separation (‘ἀπέχεσθαι’) from sexual immorality (4.3b). That Paul would single out this particular ‘vice’ as the ultimate barrier to sanctification should not be surprising.

The reason for this abhorrence [of sexual immorality in Judaism] is twofold. First, for the Jew, participation in any form of sexual immorality was tantamount to forsaking the holy God, who demanded separation from all forms of sexual immorality and impurity. Closely associated with this was the persistent belief that non-Jews were guilty of sexual immorality and that this was the direct result of their idolatry.²⁷

²⁵ ‘The Rhetoric of Election’, in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (eds. S. Porter and D. Stamps; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 536n.40.

²⁶ Carras, ‘Jewish Ethics’, 314-5.

²⁷ Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 150; see also J. Marcus, ‘Idolatry in the New Testament’, *Interpretation* 60.2 (2006): 154-5. Note that, after a recounting of the paradigmatic sinful history of Israel in 1 Corinthians 10.1-4, Paul encourages his readers not to lust (‘ἐπεθύμησαν’) after evil things (10.6), engage in sexual immorality (‘πορνεύωμεν’; 10.8), nor worship idols (‘εἰδωλολάτραι’; 10.7; ‘φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας’; 10.14). The correlation between idolatry and sexuality is explored from a sociological and cosmological perspective by S.C. Barton (influenced by Mary Douglas)

Wanamaker's reading of Jewish abhorrence of sexual immorality and its relationship to idolatry is accurate in light of such thoughts as expressed in Wis 14.12: 'For the idea of making idols was the beginning of sexual immorality (πορνείας), and the invention of them was the corruption of life'.²⁸ It is also relevant to observe that two of the three primary requirements for the Gentile believers set by the Jerusalem decree were abstinence from the 'pollution' of idolatry and sexual immorality ('τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς πορνείας'; Acts 15.20, 29; 21.25).²⁹ Silvanus' involvement in the writing of the Thessalonian epistles and his presence at the Jerusalem council (along with Paul) increases the likelihood that 'Paul had included the decree as part of the moral instruction delivered to the new believers in Thessalonica'.³⁰

A further explication of how to be obedient unto sanctification and to eschew sexual immorality involves applied knowledge. Each believer is responsible for knowing 'τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι' (4.4a). The verb κτάομαι normally has an ingressive aspect, as noted above. Thus, many scholars are led to believe that since one cannot 'acquire' one's own body, then σκεῦος must mean something else.³¹ However, though there are some instances where κτάομαι is best understood duratively, there may be a way to retain an ingressive sense while still interpreting σκεῦος as 'body'. It may be best to understand κτᾶσθαι not as an acquisition, but a *re-acquisition* or *re-possession*. This image of continually re-mastering oneself is found in another of his discussions of self-control in 1 Corinthians where he constantly subdues and dominates his body (9.27). Thus, the tense of the verb itself should not preclude reading σκεῦος as body.

the Connection?', *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 141-62.

²⁸ See also *T.Benj.* 10.10; *3 Bar* 8.5; 13.4; *T.Reub.* 4.6.

²⁹ Observe, also, that the language of conversion found in the council setting of Acts ('ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν'; 15.19) parallels Paul's same kind of language in 1 Thessalonians 1.9 ('ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεόν').

³⁰ Green, *Thessalonians*, 190.

³¹ This is, perhaps, Malherbe's (*Thessalonians*, 227) primary concern with the 'body' interpretation.

in another of his discussions of self-control in 1 Corinthians where he constantly subdues and dominates his body (9.27). Thus, the tense of the verb itself should not preclude reading σκεῦος as body. The text from the Epistle of Jeremiah (v. 58) to which we have compared Paul's language contrasts a useful 'vessel' to a worthless idol. This 'vessel' is profitable to the 'κεκτημένος', 'the one having taken possession of it', i.e., its owner. If the Thessalonians had problems involving sexual sin, as several scholars suggest,³² Paul may have purposely been communicating that they had virtually lost possession of their bodies (as 'masters') and needed to *re-gain* it. They, in a sense, would be as worthless as idols (who offer nothing to their possessors) if they committed sexual immorality. Is there any historical comparison between an idol and humans who become like idols from which Paul could draw? Certainly this thinking appears in the critiques of idolatry found in the Psalms.

Their idols are...the work of mortal hands...Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them (Ps 115.4, 8; cf. Ps 135.15, 18).³³

In Paul this is prominent in Rom 1.21 where the wicked became worthless (ἐματαιώθησαν) in their thinking. This language parallels LXX Jer 2.5 where Israel is said to have 'followed worthless things (ματαίων) and have become worthless (ἐματαιώθησαν)' – a text that clearly is referring to idol worship (see Jer 2.8).³⁴

This interpretation accords with the most natural reading of σκεῦος which metaphorically refers to the individual person as a tool, instrument, or vessel. This resonates with Pauline usage in the

³² See Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 150; Weima, 'Holiness', 98.

³³ For an in-depth appraisal of this phenomenon, see E. Meadors, *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart: A Study in Biblical Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2006); see also G. Fee, *Pauline Christology* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson), 383.

³⁴ Meadors, *Idolatry*, 105-115.

potter/vessel discourse of Romans 9.21-23³⁵ and the image of the fragile clay jars in 2 Corinthians 4.7. An apt parallel text from the New Testament, though, that has not been brought into the discussion of 1 Thessalonians 4.4 is Acts 9.15 where Luke recounts the discourse between the Lord and Ananias: 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel (σκεῦος) for me in order to bring my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel'. The essence of Paul's being a 'vessel' in this case is the carrying of the name of the Lord. It is probably no coincidence, then, that just two verses later this human gospel-vessel is filled with the Holy Spirit (9.17; cf. the discussion of 1 Thess 4.8 below).

The particular manner in which the Thessalonians are to possess their body is in 'holiness and honor' (ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ; 4.4b). This is meant to reinforce the general encouragement to pursue holiness, but the pairing of this idea with 'honor' is quite rare in Paul and finds its closest parallel in 2 Timothy 2.20-1:

In a large house there are vessels (σκεύη) not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use (τιμῇν), some for ordinary (ἀτιμίαν). All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become vessels for honorable use (σκεῦος εἰς τιμήν), consecrated (ἡγιασμένον) and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work.

In a manner similar to 1 Thessalonians 4.4, this passage takes the image of a simple vessel and applies it to the life of a believer and notes the importance of function (honorable) and status (holy/consecrated). What is even more interesting is that this text in 2 Timothy also has strong verbal and thematic resonances with the Epistle of Jeremiah which merit consideration.

³⁵ It is interesting to note that Meadors views this passage and the prophetic 'potter' texts to which it alludes as framed within the context of 'God's dealing with idolatrous Israel' (*Idolatry*, 130-33).

Gods made of wood and overlaid with **silver** and **gold** are unable to save themselves from thieves or robbers. Anyone who can will strip them of their **gold** and **silver** and of the robes they wear, and go off with this booty, and they will not be able to help themselves. So it is better to be a king who shows his courage, or a **vessel** (σκεῦος) in a **house** that serves (χρήσεται) its owner's (ὁ κεκτημένος) **need** (χρήσιμον), than to be these false gods; better even the door of a house that protects its contents, than these false gods; better also a **wooden** pillar in a palace, than these false gods (Ep Jer 57-9).

In a large **house** there are **vessels** (σκεῦη) not only of **gold** and **silver** but also of **wood** and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special **vessels** (σκεῦος), dedicated and **useful** (εὐχρηστον) to the **owner** (δεσπότη) of the **house**, ready for every good work (2 Tim 2.20-1).

Though there is not enough evidence to determine it, this New Testament passage may also be relying on this traditional language of idol critique. Looking, then, at how a vessel is dealt with in a way that attends 'holiness and honor' (1 Thess 4.4), there is a distinct interest in purification and attentiveness to the master's purpose.

A further qualification of Paul's focus on consecration is found in 4.5 where 'lustful passion' (πάθει ἐπιθυμίας) is a standard feature of pagans who do not know God. Malherbe points to a similar Christian tradition of relating lust ('ἐπιθυμίας'; 1 Pet 1.14) to ignorance ('ἄγνοιά'; 1.14) and idolatry.³⁶ One could also point to Galatians 4.8-9: 'Formerly, when you did not know God (οὐκ εἰδότες

³⁶ 1 Peter refers to their former life as one of 'ματαίως' – the same kind of 'emptiness' that appears in contexts of idol critique (See, e.g., Wis 15.8; Isa 44.9; Jer 10.15; 51.18; cf. Acts 14.15).

θεόν), you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again (ἐπιστρέφετε) to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? (NRSV)'. The language Paul uses here in Galatians of 'turning back' would be, in a sense, retroversion to a former religious way of life. The same verb (ἐπιστρέφω) is used in 1 Thessalonians 1.9 of the Thessalonians' turning from idols to the true God, standard language of Jewish hostility and propaganda against the worship of false gods.³⁷

Paul's next statement in 4.6 refers to the purpose of his primary command for the mastering of the 'vessel', namely, that no one's rights should be violated.³⁸ The theme of the Lord-as-avenger also appears in 2 Thessalonians 1.8 where, though the primary interest is in those who persecute the believers in Thessalonica, the objects of God's justice are those who 'do not know God (μὴ εἰδόσιν θεόν)'. Again it is reinforced that sexual immorality and idolatry (or ignorance of the true God) are closely linked.

For Paul, sexual immorality (often in partnership with or as a result of idolatry) naturally led to moral and ritual impurity (ἀκαθαρσία; 1 Thess 4.7). This impurity was the status of those who worshipped idols in Romans 1 (cf. 1.24), and in Colossians 3.5 where sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and sexual greed³⁹ are called 'idolatry (εἰδωλολατρία)'. The seriousness of Paul's injunction towards consecration is revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4.8 where the one who rejects his teaching is disregarding, not a mortal, but God himself. But why should he be so insistent that this God is

³⁷ See Gaventa, *Thessalonians*, 19; Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 119-20.

³⁸ That this verse is a continuation of the issue of sexual immorality is persuasively argued by Collins, *Studies*, 333-35; see also D. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 83.

³⁹ The word 'πλεονεξίαν' means 'greed' in a general sense, but the context suggests a sexual connotation; see James D.G. Dunn, *Colossians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 215-6.

the one who ‘gives his Holy Spirit’? Certainly there is some relationship to Spirit-possession and authority (see John 3.34). However, Paul’s later thoughts on sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6 are instructive:

‘...anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun sexual immorality! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the sexually immoral person sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body’ (6.17-20).

It is likely that Paul’s mentioning of the Holy Spirit’s endowment in 1 Thessalonians 4.8 also refers to the presence of God within the life of the community and the body of each person. There may, though, be even more to it than that. In 2 Corinthians the believers are, once again, called the ‘temple of the living God’, and Paul poses the poignant rhetorical question, ‘What agreement has the temple of God with idols?’ (2 Cor 6.16).⁴⁰ This juxtaposition ends a series of oppositions (light/darkness, Christ/Beliar, believer/unbeliever) and climaxes with the contrasting of the *true* temple with *false* idols. If the earlier items follow the pattern of juxtaposing ‘balanced

⁴⁰ Though some are convinced that this passage (2 Cor 6.14-7.1) is alien to Paul and to 2 Corinthians, we have yet to find a manuscript of the epistle that omits this passage or even relocates it. Additionally, arguments from ‘unique vocabulary’ are specious as even an uncontested passage such as 1 Cor 4.7-13 also contains a number of *hapax legomena*; see P. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 317; also D.A. deSilva, ‘Recasting the Moment of Decision: 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 in Its Literary Context’, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 31 (1993): 3-16; J. Lambrecht, ‘The Fragment 2 Cor vi 14-vii I: A Plea for Authenticity’, *Miscellanea Neotestamentica II* (eds. T. Baarda, A.F.J. Klijn, W.C. van Unnik; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 531-49; J. Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Relating 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1 to its Context’, *NTS* 33 (1987): 272-75; W.J. Webb, *Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1* (Sheffield, JSOT Press: 1993).

opposites' or their 'exact antithesis',⁴¹ in some way there is a category into which 'temple' and 'idol' fit.⁴² What, then, is the rubric for this final statement? In a sense, the most general concept is that both items *supposedly* contain the presence of a deity.⁴³ But, as the Corinthians are told that *they are* in fact the temple of the living God, this implies the presence of God through his Spirit – a point made more than once in 1 Corinthians (3.16; 6.19). The implication of this would be that they are a temple of God that contains his Spirit, and that they are *not* like an idol (anymore) that would have no divine presence. It is probably not a coincidence that Paul focuses on this community-temple having πνεῦμα (i.e. 'the Holy Spirit') when it was a standard critique of idols that they possess no πνεῦμα (i.e. 'breath'; see Ps 135.17; Jer 10.14; 51.17; Hab 2.19; Ep Jer 25; cf. Rev 13.15).

That this Spirit/breath imagery is relevant to the idea of the human 'vessel' in 1 Thessalonians 4.1-8 can be supported in a number of ways. Aside from the fact that Paul's language of Spirit-reception (4.8) comes just four verses after his 'vessel' statement (4.4), one can observe a similar phenomenon in Acts 9. In 9.15, as noted above, Paul is chosen as the Lord's σκεῦος to bear his 'name' to the Gentiles. Two verses later he is filled with the Holy Spirit (9.17; 'πληροθῆς πνεύματος ἁγίου'). Though this verb πίμπλημι is Luke's general word for being Spirit-filled, it was also commonly used in conjunction with σκεῦος for the idea of filling a container (e.g., 2 Kings 4.8). In the interpretation of the apostolic fathers, we also find this concept of human 'vessel' as container of the Spirit. In the

⁴¹ Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 345-6.

⁴² E.g., light/darkness fits into an aesthetic category and Christ/Belial an authority/allegiance category.

⁴³ This is at least the intent of Solomon's temple project, though in 1 Kings 8.27 (cf. 2 Chron 2.6; 6.18) he acknowledges the impossibility of this confinement of the divine. And yet Israel is told that 'the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him' (Hab 2.20). This is in contrast to the lifeless and quiet idol that has no ability even to speak (Hab 2.18-19)!

Epistle of Barnabas 7.3 we read that Christ was to offer up for sins ‘the vessel of the Spirit (τὸ σκεῦος τοῦ πνεύματος)’.⁴⁴ Certainly this resonates with Paul’s perspective that the human vessel (‘σκεῦος’) holds a powerful treasure inside (2 Cor 4.7).⁴⁵

5. Conclusion

The interpretation that has been proposed in this study of 1 Thessalonians 4.4 and its context is complex (though no more than most other theories on the subject) and thus a summary of the main elements of this reading may be helpful. Primarily, based on the closest semantic and syntactical parallel in language, the Epistle of Jeremiah’s discourse on idolatry (specifically v. 59) offers an insightful combination of κτάομαι and σκεῦος. In this apocryphal letter, an idol is compared to a common household vessel. It is better to have a simple ordinary cup or bowl that may be of some use to the owner (‘ὁ κεκτημένος’), than to have a purposeless and worthless idol that offers nothing to the one who possesses it. The implication is that an idol is empty and cannot accomplish anything of value. Paul, picking up on this sort of analogy, may be referring to his readers as vessels that may or may not be of worth to the one who possesses it. If it is rendered useless (in this case by sexual immorality), it is no better than an idol. This does not presume that Paul or his readers were dependent on the Epistle of Jeremiah. Both in the OT and in early Jewish literature there were many texts that contained critiques of idolatry and often repeated the same arguments.

The scholarly discussion on this matter is carried forward in this reading because it is able to interact with and attempt to resolve a

⁴⁴ Carras (‘Jewish Ethics’, 310) has a same appraisal of the language of ‘vessel’ in 1 Peter 3.7.

⁴⁵ J.-F. Collanges (*Enigmes de la deuxième épître de Paul aux Corinthiens: Etude exégétique de 2 Cor. 2:14-7:4* [SNTSMS 18; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], 146) sees 2 Cor 4.7 as referring to the honor and dignity of a ‘vessel’ that is an instrument of God (See Isa 10.15; 54.16; Acts 9.15).

number of corollary issues. First, as has been stated, it takes seriously the need to understand the relationship between κτάρμαι and σκεῦος, whereas previous attempts have focused on one or the other. Second, one must account for the very Jewish character of the paraenesis that is prominent throughout 1 Thessalonians 4. The suggested interpretation takes into account that we have little understanding of exactly what Paul taught to the Thessalonians, but we can be quite certain that it at least involved the nature and problem of idolatry (1 Thess 1.9-10). Third, the interpretation must account for the specific focus on πορνεία (4.3) which is Paul's singular interest in the matter of holiness and sanctification in this passage. As it has been shown, in Jewish thought (and evidenced in early Christianity), sexual immorality was regularly tied to idolatry. This is reinforced in the statement in 1 Thessalonians 4.5 that the ἔθνη 'indulge in lust because they do not know the true God. Finally, a good interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4.4 will attempt to read his metaphorical understanding of σκεῦος first in light of his usage elsewhere (Rom 9.21-23; 2 Cor 4.7; cf. 2 Tim 2.20-1), and also in comparison with other New Testament authors (Acts 9.15; 1 Pet 3.7). We have attempted to take seriously that Paul brings in close proximity his language of vessel and Spirit-endowment which is juxtaposed with idols that are empty vessels containing no breath.

As a final remark, it should be observed that the interpretation proposed offers an important insight into how Paul taught his converts. If our reading is correct, what Paul taught in terms of his message of 'salvation' or 'the gospel' (i.e. turning from idols to serve God) was also redeployed to address ethical issues (such as sexual immorality).⁴⁶ Though expressed a bit differently, Morna Hooker espouses this perspective by stating that 'in dealing with moral problems, Paul goes back to first principles – and that means, that he goes back to the gospel'.⁴⁷ In the end, our interpretation is more than

⁴⁶ Is this not demonstrated in Paul's strategy to know nothing among the Corinthians but 'Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor 2.2)?

⁴⁷ *From Adam to Christ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 66.

a 'modest proposal',⁴⁸ but neither will it likely 'break the impasse',⁴⁹ in scholarship on 1 Thessalonians 4:4. Rather, it is hoped that this reading will advance the discussion by bringing relevant background texts to light and situating the discussion within the literary context with an eye towards Paul's theology and teaching in 1 Thessalonians and elsewhere.

Nijay Gupta

⁴⁸ J. Bassler's 'Σκεῦος: A Modest Proposal for Illuminating Paul's Use of Metaphor in 1 Thessalonians 4:4' (*Social World of the First Christians* [ed. L.M. White & O.L. Yarbrough; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 53-66) suggests that the most appropriate parallel is 1 Cor 7.36-38 and 'spiritual marriages' – each one should know the benefits of having a virgin partner.

⁴⁹ See Smith, '1 Thessalonians 4:4: Breaking the Impasse', which, though quite useful, is a bit too optimistic.

Setting the Book of Ruth in its literary context with special reference to the Epilogue of the Book of Judges

D. Johnston

Living in West Africa and working in Bible translation, I have had the opportunity, in the Sissala language of Burkina Faso, to be involved in the translation of the book of Ruth, to listen to groups reading it in their mother tongue and discussing its content. However, when the book of Judges was subsequently translated and read, my interest was sparked in this subject because Ruth was now being discussed in the context of the book of Judges. Set side by side they share some common features and also provide interesting contrasts. The interpretation of Ruth is enriched by these contrasts. Details that would have been overlooked in Ruth become meaningful. I would like to show in this paper that the author of Ruth consciously intended the book to be viewed in the context of the book of Judges, as a contrast to the epilogue of Judges,⁵⁰ indeed as an alternative epilogue to that of the book of Judges.

Ruth and the epilogue of Judges (chapters 17-21) share common features in their historical setting and geographical connection. The historical setting of the book of Ruth is, as its author clearly points out, during the days of the judges (Ruth 1.1). The events in Ruth seem to have taken place toward the end of the era of the judges, because the scene is set three generations before David.⁵¹ The book

⁵⁰ Gooding, D.W., 'The Composition of the Book of Judges' *Eretz-Israel, Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* 16, H.M.Orlinsky Volume, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society (1982) 75.

Webb, B.G., *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTSS 46; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987)

⁵¹ Merrill, Eugene, 'The Book of Ruth: Narration and Shared themes' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (1985) 131.

of Judges itself portrays the epoch by a succession of cycles⁵² that get progressively worse for Israel in terms of religious practice, civil strife and increasing lawlessness, of which there are hints in the book of Ruth. By the end of Judges the author paints a very bleak picture of Israel as a nation, whereas Ruth, despite the hints of lawlessness, portrays a positive picture of individuals from the town of Bethlehem, who bring salvation to others. The geographical connection is that of Bethlehem, emphasized by the repeated use of 'Bethlehem (in) Judah', a distinctive phrase used at the beginning of the two main narratives that comprise the epilogue of Judges and at the start of the book of Ruth (Ruth 1.1).

Ruth and the book of Judges both contribute to the larger narrative framework that extends from Genesis to Kings. On the one hand, they both anticipate the book of Samuel in which the monarchy will be established and, on the other hand, they presuppose the biblical sweep from Genesis to Joshua in which the tribes of Ephraim and Judah are juxtaposed. In the epilogue of the book of Judges the two main stories have the refrain:

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

'In those days there was no king in Israel.' (17.6; 18.1; 19.1; 21.25) This seems to be the only glimmer of hope, which the narrator sees, in the midst of civil strife where every other method of human, governmental institution has failed. Another refrain is sounded at the beginning and at the end of the epilogue (17.6; 21.25):

אִישׁ הַיֹּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה

'Every man did what was right in his own eyes.' The word 'right' (Hebrew יָשָׁר) in this context seems to exclude the notion of anarchy and emphasize the idea of human justice disconnected from God. Within this bleak situation the tribe of Benjamin is portrayed in a very bad light. They have acted worse than any foreigners, not respecting the sanctity of hospitality to the traveler that ought to be observed between tribes. It is ironical that the Levite chose not to

⁵² Wenham, Gordon J., *Story as Torah, Reading the Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd. 2000) 47. Wenham refers to the 'degenerative cycles', which occur in the main body of the book.

spend the night in Jebus, among foreigners, but in Gibeah among the tribe of Benjamin. If one takes the elements mentioned in this second story – the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeah, Mizpah and the all-tribal assembly, it is hard not to anticipate 1 Sam.10 when Saul is anointed as king and all these elements are mentioned again. The book of Ruth, in contrast, begins with Elimelech (meaning ‘my God is king’) and depicts Boaz and Ruth as righteous, using the epithet *hesed* when describing them.⁵³ They are the ancestors of that lineage whose descendant is David, a fact that is noted at the end of the book on two occasions (Ruth 4.17,22). The book of Ruth portrays an exemplary story for the annals of David, anticipating him being anointed as king in 1 Sam.16.

The epilogue of Judges and Ruth also look back to and presuppose the writings from Genesis to Joshua in which the tribes of Ephraim and Judah jockey for position.⁵⁴ Genesis finishes by appearing to present the chosen line through Joseph/Ephraim, having also drawn attention in a striking way to Judah/Perez. Under the leadership of Joshua the tribe of Ephraim maintains its position of preeminence, but after his lifetime moral decline sets in among the Ephraimites. The book of Judges shows Ephraim in decline and Judah in the ascendancy. In Judges every mention of Ephraim is negative and refers to disobedience, civil strife or moral corruption, whereas Judah is mentioned at the beginning and at the end in terms of obedience to God and chosen by him to lead the other tribes.⁵⁵ The book of Ruth shows the ascendancy of Judah very clearly. It picks up on the importance of the chosen line. In Ruth 4 the *tôlû dôt* formula occurs, combining with the themes of blessing and seed, as in Genesis, to

⁵³ Gow, Murray, *The Book of Ruth: Its Structure, Theme and Purpose* (Leicester: Apollos, 1992) 116.

⁵⁴ The Chronicler makes an interesting commentary on these blessings: ‘Reuben was the firstborn but because he polluted his father’s bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel... Though Judah became strong among his brothers and a ruler came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph.’ (1Chron.5.1-2)

⁵⁵ It would seem that at a later stage the tribe of Ephraim was rejected in favour of the tribe of Judah. (Ps.78.67-68)

emphasize the significance of Perez as the one who continues the chosen line to King David. The *tôl| dôt* formula supplies a link between the patriarchal and monarchical eras. It shows that the patriarchs are directly related to the Israelite royal dynasty of David. Beginning in Genesis there is the expectation of a monarchy being established. Although the seeds of this are mentioned in the Pentateuch, the expectation is highlighted in the epilogue of Judges and the book of Ruth.

Having looked at the epilogue of Judges and the book of Ruth in general terms, we shall now consider them in more detail. The common geographical connection is Bethlehem, emphasized by the distinctive phrase *בית לחם יהודה* Bethlehem (in) Judah (Judg.17.7-9; 19.1,2,18; Ruth 1.1,2). The Book of Ruth seems to be part of a so-called Bethlehem trilogy, Bethlehem (in) Judah being mentioned at the start of the two main narratives in the Judges' epilogue and at the beginning of the book of Ruth. The emphasis on Bethlehem (in) Judah is particularly striking because the only other mention of this phrase in the Old Testament refers to David (1 Sam.17.12). This repetition of Bethlehem seems to be due to the fact that it was the village where David was born.

While the historical settings and geographical connections are similar, a stark contrast exists between the events reported in the epilogue of Judges and Ruth. The main themes of the epilogue of Judges are the idolatry and the moral decline of the Israelites, whereas in Ruth, the reader sees a Gentile rejecting idolatry in order to follow the God of Israel, and the exemplary behaviour of the book's main characters. The name of the Lord is used in the epilogue of Judges but it is a cover for human action, whereas in Ruth, the name of God is used aright. In the second story of the Judges' epilogue advice and legal decisions are shown to be unwise and have destructive consequences, whereas Naomi's advice and Boaz's legal decisions are wise and constructive.

The sharp contrast between the epilogue of Judges and Ruth is reflected in how the main characters are portrayed. The epilogue of

Judges is in two parts and recounts two stories in detail. Both stories, in the context of decline, refer to the tribe of Ephraim, a Levite and to Bethlehem in Judah. In the first story one of the elements of decline is the corruption within Ephraim in the person of Micah. He steals from his mother and leads the Levite astray. The second story is about a Levite from Ephraim who fails to take care of his wife. While the tribe of Benjamin is guilty of gross immorality, the end of the story recounts the unjust punishment of all Benjaminites. The author paints a bleak picture of moral corruption, even when the Benjaminites are given wives.

At the beginning of the book of Ruth the reader sees that Ruth, although a foreigner, cares for her mother-in-law and wants to know her God. Ruth and Boaz are depicted as role models in terms of the life of '*hesed*'. Naomi refers to Ruth (and to God) by this term (1.8); she also refers to Boaz in this way (2.20) and Boaz refers to Ruth in the same manner (3.10). Boaz, a righteous man, follows the protocol to have Ruth as his wife, redeeming her at the gate rather than taking her at the threshing floor, in contrast to the Benjaminites in Judges who take their wives without any protocol. Boaz cares for Ruth and Naomi and once married to Ruth provides a son who, significantly, like Boaz, is designated a kinsman redeemer.

Thus when the epilogue of Judges and the book of Ruth are set side by side and considered in detail, they provide interesting contrasts. They contrast the tribe of Judah and especially the line of Boaz with the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin. Interestingly, with all three of these tribes, kingship is associated in one way or another.

While the epilogue of Judges and the book of Ruth provide significant contrasts, each in its turn uses narrative analogy, drawing on the Book of Genesis to underline certain elements. In the epilogue of Judges the episode in Gibeah echoes Genesis 19 and in the book of Ruth an analogy is made between Ruth and Tamar (Genesis 38).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Gunn, D.M & Fewell, D.N., *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 164-165.

In Gibeah the author describes how an elderly Ephraimite gives hospitality to a fellow Ephraimite and his concubine, rather than have them spending the night in the open square. Instead of upholding the sanctity of that hospitality, a crowd gathers, wanting to engage in immoral behaviour. The Ephraimites are ready to offer up their womenfolk – the host's daughter and the traveler's concubine. This echoes the story of Sodom, when Lot gives hospitality to two angels rather than have them spend the night in the open square. Again a crowd gathers, wanting to have sexual relations with the angels. In these circumstances Lot offers his two daughters. In the end the angels blind the offenders in Genesis whereas in Judges the Ephraimite's concubine is raped and killed. The Judges' episode reveals that these are dark and shocking times in the history of Israel; the analogy with Genesis 19 emphasizes this fact.

The analogy between Ruth and Tamar, while at first seemingly inappropriate, is significant. Firstly, they are both Gentile women, foreigners to the Israelite nation. Yet, by their fortitude and courage in the midst of unusual situations, they show their identification with Israel and God's purposes for it. Secondly, Tamar and Ruth are both widowed and are unable to have offspring. Each has a problem of implementing a levirate marriage. Thirdly, in both cases Tamar and Ruth's actions are open to misinterpretation. Tamar's relationship with Judah casts her as a prostitute and Ruth's outing to the threshing floor could be perceived as encouraging sexual immorality. Fourthly, both are associated with a special family lineage. In Genesis the Hebrew word זֶרַע 'seed' or 'offspring' is used as a *Leitwort* to draw attention to the distinctive line of 'seed'.⁵⁷ In Gen. 38.8-9 special attention is given to this motif, making the subsequent birth of Perez significant. In Ruth the people and elders at the gate invoke the blessing: 'May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.' (4.12) Perez' birth is also emphasized at the end of the book (4.18).

⁵⁷ Alexander T. Desmond: *From Paradise to the Promised Land* (England: Paternoster, 1995) 103-111

In conclusion, our reading of Ruth has noted the common features of historical setting and geographical connection with the epilogue of Judges. We have also noted the stark contrasts that occur when the two sections are considered side by side; it is easy to view them as two alternative epilogues. By setting Ruth within the literary context of Genesis to Kings our reading is enriched, especially when we observe Judah's ascendancy over Ephraim and David's kingship over Saul's.

D. Johnston

Book Review *IBS* 27/4,2009

William S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, (London, T&T Clark, 2006), 200pp. £24.99. ISBN: 9780567033673

This book is the culmination of many years work on the question of Jewish and Gentile identity in Paul's writings by the author and on-going interaction with members of other faiths. Campbell's conclusion is that, with the advent of Christian faith, the past, with its culture and identities cannot be said to be obliterated, but rather, transformed. Christian faith in Paul's theologizing, says Campbell, is not "an entirely independent culture which replaces, and is discontinuous with, previously existing patterns of life."

Campbell's book, then, goes about demonstrating that it was Paul's contention that Jews and Gentiles could and should retain distinct identities in Christ, by examining particular sections of Paul's letters and particular issues. Each chapter is quite self-contained, and although the argument does not build logically chapter by chapter, it is, nonetheless, sustained forcibly throughout.

After an introductory chapter in which there are some definitions and Campbell introduces his theme and outlines how his argument is to unfold, Campbell gives a quick overview of the history of treatment of the issues under consideration and concludes that the place of Judaism in Christian identity has never really been properly addressed and has often been simply negated.

Chapter three considers Paul's relationship to other Christian leaders and the Antioch incident, concluding that previous treatments of these have typically seen Paul as much too sectarian. Paul, according to Campbell, cannot in any way be said to be anti Judaistic, nor should we view him as having established the incompatibility between Christianity and Judaism.

Campbell goes on to show how Paul created a Gentile identity in Christ through his use of the Jewish scriptures and, in particular, the fatherhood of Abraham, thus locating Gentile believers within "a larger cultural story". The result of this is the need to recognize that Pauline faith was essentially Jewish, where "gentiles were obligated

to renounce fundamental aspects of their former way of life with resultant wide-ranging social implications”, whereas Jewish believers “did not need to repudiate their ancestral faith, but rather to transform it from a Christological perspective”.

In chapter 5, Campbell considers the difficulties in relationship in the early 1st century between Christian groups and what he terms “other forms of Judaism” and suggests that it is too simplistic to see this in simply dualistic terms and that the dominating reality of the Roman Empire must also be taken into account. This should result in a view of Gentile Christian identity which sees it less as formed in opposition to Judaism and more as being the result of a variety of historical factors and influences, not least the Empire.

Chapter 6 considers a range of Pauline texts in order to examine how Paul saw the Christian church – as a third race or as the new Israel or as redefined Israel, or, as Campbell prefers, as a separate but related entity to Israel. It was, contends Campbell, Paul’s ideal that both Jewish and Gentile Christians were to remain within the cultural identity to which they originally belonged. For Paul, nothing displaced Israel in God’s purposes and Gentiles, although welcomed by God, related to Israel and in some sense sharing in Israel’s inheritance, did not become part of Israel. Campbell can talk of believing Jews and Gentiles being separate branches of the one olive tree – “one but not the same in Christ”, but it is not entirely clear in this schema what becomes of historical Israel. On the one hand, God’s faithfulness and purposes continue for Israel; on the other, there is an olive tree, the church or Christ, into which believing Jews and Gentiles are grafted, each with their own identities intact. This almost seems like the third race which Campbell is adamant Paul did not espouse, albeit with a strong emphasis on the cultural integrity of both groups. The future of Israel seems unclear in this analysis.

In the next chapter, Campbell discusses Jewish identity in Romans and concludes that Paul had no interest in encouraging Jewish Christian to stop adhering to their way of life. Here he considers in particular chapter 2, disputing the consensus that Paul here is critical of Judaism and chapters 14-15, which he feels, far from being

negative about Jewish practices, is affirmative of them for Jewish Christians. Once again Campbell drives home his point that it is Paul's intention that his congregations should be accepting of differing identities in Christ, without rancour or discrimination. Although he does, in passing, discuss other passages of Romans, one wonders if some other parts of the letter might not support his thesis so well.

Chapter 8 again turns to Romans, in particular, chapters 9 – 11, where Campbell address the question of Paul's understanding of Israel. Campbell rejects the idea that this might be the church and is strongly of the opinion that for Paul, Israel means historic Israel and that God's covenant promises to Israel remain. Although Gentiles can become Abraham's children and share in Israel's inheritance, nevertheless Paul does not lump Gentiles and Jews into one common identity. Campbell is adamant that it was never Paul's intention for the church to displace, take over or dismantle Judaism and this allows him to take seriously Paul's hopes for Israel in chapter 11. It is not entirely clear, however, in all this how Paul's insistence on Christ as the exclusive defining element for God's people squares with the idea of an historic Israel whose covenant inheritance continues unchanged. Of course, one might say this is not entirely clear in Romans either!

The penultimate chapter deals with the idea of "new creation" from 2 Cor.5.17 and Campbell wants firmly to relate this to the "previous creation", without which it has no real content. He suggests that, for Paul, faith in Christ is the primary identity marker, but within that, Gentile and Jewish identities are not erased. Finally, Campbell concludes the book with a discussion of Paul's "theology of transformation". Here again he presses home his point that for Paul, in Christ, Jewish believers can retain their ethnic identity and that Gentiles must not be forced to become Jews. Transformation does not mean obliteration of one's cultural background.

Campbell's book covers important ground and his insistence on the apostle's Jewishness, the continuity between faith in Christ and Judaism and the undoubted Jewish nature of the first Christian

communities, though widely accepted these days, is, nevertheless, worth emphasizing. He raises important questions about the nature of Christian identity through this study of the integration of Jews and Gentiles in Paul's congregations, particularly for the multi-cultural societies in which we moderns live. One has a nagging suspicion, however, that Campbell's Paul, so accepting of diversity, is just a little too close to what we would all like Paul to be like, that he is, perhaps, a little too modern (or indeed, post-modern!).

While the continuity between Judaism and Pauline Christianity can be clearly seen in Paul's letters, the issue of the future of God's covenant with Israel continues to be a point of considerable interpretive discussion, particularly in reference to Romans. Campbell, while rejecting a supercessionist position, does not plump for the two-covenant option. It is not, however, entirely clear how his insistence on both the persistence of the covenant promises to historical Israel and the crucial importance of faith in Christ to both Jews and Gentiles (without loss of ethnic identity) is resolved.

Campbell, however, makes his case for "transformation, not obliteration" in Christ well, in a sustained manner throughout the book and it is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the formation of Christian identity in Paul.

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